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ABSTRACT

Indicators of program quality for adult basic education programs, developed by consultants, are assessed as they might be applicable to English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) program evaluation. Sample quality indicators were developed in the areas of program context (i.e., organizational structure of service delivery, participant characteristics), program process and content (including planning, curriculum and materials, staff qualifications), and program outcomes. This paper examines Pelavin Associates' sample outline of proposed areas in which indicators as well as sample data elements for the indicators will be offered. For each program area in which quality indicators are recommended, the following questions are addressed: (1) Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in development of indicators, and what adjustments and adaptations to generic indicators may be necessary?; (2) Are the indicators appropriate for ESL programs, unnecessary, incomplete?; and (3) What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators? Responses to the questions are appended to the main text. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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INDICATORS OF PROGRAM QUALITY
AN ESL PROGRAMMING PERSPECTIVE

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This paper was commissioned by Pelavin Associates Inc. to assist them in developing indicators of program quality for state adult education programs. Pelavin is preparing these indicators for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Recent amendments to the Adult Education Act require that indicators be developed at the federal level by July 1992 and by each state by 1993. This paper examines Pelavin's sample outline of proposed areas in which indicators will be addressed and some sample data elements for the indicators. This paper is written from an ESL programming perspective.

Pelavin has developed Sample Quality Indicators in the following areas:

SECTION I: PROGRAM CONTEXT

SECTION II. PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT
- Part I. Program Planning
- Part II. Program Process & Content
- Part III.Curriculum and Materials
- Part IV. Staff Qualifications

SECTION III. PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The following questions posed by Pelavin Associates are addressed at the end of this document (**see Questions for Consideration**) for each program area in which quality indicators are recommended:

1) Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?

2) Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary? Should any be added? Which ones and why?

3) What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?

INTRODUCTION

In general, the development and use of quality indicators will be welcomed by the ESL field, particularly in light of the new federal guidelines which will further open up the delivery of ABE and ESL services to other providers. However, how indicators are formulated at the state level, what expectations they carry, and what support will be made available for implementation will be the determining factors in whether indicators will be accepted as the means of improving program quality or viewed as another bureaucratic burden on already overstretched program staff. If the use of quality indicators is to be successful we need to consider the following:

* Due to the wide diversity among ESL programs in terms of type of program, program setting, learner goals and funding sources, it is impossible to have a **"one size fits all"** approach to quality indicators. Research has found that even among the best programs, there is no "one definitive ESL or Literacy program" whose practices and procedures should be adopted by all.[1]

* Most programs have been operating on a shoestring. It will be difficult to compare programs and hold them accountable to an external set of outcome standards when some programs are not used to having outcome indicators of their own. **Adequate funding** to implement quality standards must be forthcoming. A sufficient period of **time to raise programs to quality levels** will be required along with **technical assistance and even external evaluators.**

* The primary purpose of quality indicators should be to help programs **define themselves** as **educationally sound systems** for the delivery of ESL and literacy instruction.

Section I & II of the quality indicators proposed by Pelavin can help with this **definition of process.** Section III seeks to use quality indicators to **measure outcomes**.

SECTION I. PROGRAM CONTEXT

Indicators of quality in the area of "program context" would require that ESL programs be able to define the context in which services will be offered. This entails an assessment of need for the services, a description of organizational structure of the delivery system and a definition of the characteristics of the participants. Pelavin suggests defining contexts through information gathered in the following areas:

1. **Need For Program Services**
A. Number and demographics of target population
B. Literacy Levels in community
C. High School drop-outs in community
D. Employment related skill needs of community

2. **Organization and Structure of Delivery System**
A. Number of projects
B. Locations and settings of projects
C. Type of projects (e.g. ESL,GED)

3. **Characteristics of Participants by skill level**
A. Number and demographics of participants by skill level
B. Number and demographics of participants by program type
C. Number and demographics of participants by program setting

RATIONALE:
The process of defining context should begin with the development of a program mission and ideally a statement of the ESL program's driving philosophy. The **mission statement** should clearly and concisely define the program's purpose for existence. Yet, the statement must be **broad enough to enable continued program growth and evolution** through flexible and responsive programming. Once the ESL program understands and articulates its own broad mission, it can make more rational decisions on program direction and use of resources. Furthermore, the state agency can more objectively determine an applicant agency's appropriateness for delivering the proposed services, and determine among other things:

* if the applicant agency understands the funding agency's mission and priorities (which themselves must first be clearly articulated to all)

- if the applicant agency has adequately defined its target population
- if the target population is eligible for services
- to what extent the need for services exists
- how much of the need the applicant agency can realistically address
- if proposed services match the needs of the target population, and
- the extent to which proposed services address a wide range of community needs and learner goals

Moreover, requiring ESL programs to provide information in these areas will strengthen the program's ability to make an assessment of the overall need for program services, and it will help them to determine their "strategic market position in relation to other providers."[2] This is even more important now as new providers enter the delivery system. Information required by the proposed indicators will help both new and existing programs to clearly define "what business" they are in and what services or benefits they can offer to specific constituencies. It will require programs to closely examine and reexamine their immediate program and environmental context. By doing so, they will become better equipped to determine not only who they are serving, **but more importantly, who they are not serving and whether or not they should be.** This information, of course, will lead to more creative and dynamic programming because it will require regular assessment of needs and an evaluation of service response to those needs.

The most important aspect of ESL programs to consider is that they have ever changing populations. Programs should conduct periodic environmental scans to determine such information as:

- Population trends
- Economic development trends
- Workplace trends
- Legislative trends[3]

There are several other questions that ESL programs might want to investigate, such as what are the educational motivators among the target population, how does the target population spend its time, when are participants available for instruction, etc. Clearly answers to these and other questions will provide important information to both the ESL program planners and those responsible for determining whether proposed services are warranted. Realistically, however, because of time and budget constraints, programs should only be required to demonstrate their understanding of the target population, the current institutional response from other providers in the service delivery area, and the extent of need for services by providing information such as the proposed Pelavin examples.

SECTION II: PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT

Additional areas in which indicators of program quality are being considered are program process and content. These areas relate to: **program planning, program processes and content, staff qualifications, and curriculum and materials.**

PART I. Program Planning

Pelavin suggests that program planning should consist of such elements as:

1. **Community input in program development**
   - A. Existence of an advisory board
   - B. Program holds public hearings
   - C. Use of a needs assessment
   - D. Other sources consulted (e.g., employers, staff, etc.)
2. **Coordination activities**
   - A. Existence of coordination arrangements
   - B. Type of coordinated activities
3. **Written operational plan**
   - A. Existence of plan
   - B. Specific program goals and objectives consistent with state plan
   - C. Plan development process

RATIONALE:

Program planning is a **process** which includes identifying needs, designing program activities, implementing those activities, evaluating results, and making further program decisions. This planning should result in a product - a written operational plan which enables all personnel to understand, analyze, and critique the program goals, objectives, and the strategies used to achieve them. **It sets the framework for an educationally sound program. Ongoing** analysis, critique, and revision of plans enable programs to remain dynamic and responsive to new needs and population trends. It is therefore a reasonable requirement for programs to not only be able to describe their **process** for successful implementation, but also their **means of measuring** that success within those implementation steps. Establishing indicators of program quality in the area of program planning will lead to more effective implementation and informative evaluation systems for both programs and funding agencies. **Requiring evidence of planning** will also enable both the program and the state agencies to determine if a program has struck a very necessary balance between what needs to be maintained and what needs to be changed. Although many programs have been in operation for a long time, it is important that ongoing reevaluation of program needs and activities be conducted in order to determine what activities still meet the target population's needs and which ones have just become ritual. In this way, program activities can be more targeted to current training needs, and resources can be used more effectively.

What must be safeguarded, however, is a **program's flexibility**. An operational plan must not be so rigid or a program manager so concerned about being evaluated against the plan, that it cannot be amended in order to meet a more urgent or changing need. Program planners must remember that they are there for the learners, and policy at all levels must support that.

Community input in ESL programs is also important. There is a growing trend among ESL programs to seek out and involve representatives from the language communities that are to be served, the learners themselves, and other sources of input (including major employers and potential employers) that have an interest in the target community. Some examples of collaboration and meaningful input are:

* learner and/or teacher participation in governance, program planning & evaluation, curriculum, etc.
* collaborations with other literacy providers, workplace settings(unions,employers)

Quality indicators should encourage these types of collaborations where appropriate and necessary.

PART II: PROGRAM PROCESS AND CONTENT

Pelavin suggests quality indicators for the following activities:

1. **Recruitment**
2. **Program intake procedures**
3. **Ongoing assessment methods**
4. **Support services**
5. **Exit and follow up procedures**

RATIONALE:
The indicators of program quality that Pelavin suggests here are consistent with the work of other researchers who have identified effective and educationally sound program processes. In the areas of program content, Rene Lerche concluded from her work on The National Adult Literacy Study (NALP) that effective adult literacy programs result from a systematic approach to program design and implementation. "Successful programs have been designed as total education systems under which there is a balanced emphasis on (1) clearly stated learning objectives,(2) assessment of learner needs and progress, (3) instructional processes, (4) guidance and counseling, and (5) program management and evaluation." Lerche finds that effective programs:

* are clear about their goals
* have measurable objectives for each program activity
* assist learners in determining if the program is suited to their goals
* have clear learner outcomes and standards for judging them
* diagnose each learner's needs and develop individual learning plans
* tie learning objectives to instructional methods, materials, and assessment
* provide feedback to learners on their progress and document progress
* evaluate their program's effectiveness[4]

Aguirre International, in their U.S. Department of Education Study of Effective and Innovative Practices in Adult ESL Literacy Programs, also examined eight program components similar to the NALP: (1) community outreach (2) needs assessment, (3) program design, (4) curriculum, (5) approaches and methods, (6) initial assessment and progress evaluation, (7) staff development, and (8) support services.[5]

These components are the nuts and bolts of an ESL program. They identify who is to be served, how they will be recruited, how their skills will be assessed for placement and progress, what support services will breakdown barriers to participation, and what will happen at program exit and follow up. **Indicators of program quality should be established in these areas in such a way as to demonstrate to the funding agency that the program processes have been articulated based on the information that was forthcoming during the planning process and needs assessment.** The key to successful and responsive ESL program design is to strike a balance between what a program can offer (given its experience, resources and staff) and what the learners need and want. Quality indicators should be structured to help shape this process.

The following are some issues to consider within various program activities:

Recruitment
Most ESL programs will have no trouble defining their target populations, their recruitment methods, and their program outreach activities. Indicators of program quality should require that programs be able to demonstrate that they are targeting outreach efforts to learners for whom the program is appropriate and can show learners how the program can help them.

Program Intake Procedures
Program assessment procedures will, in some cases, have to be tightened up and be more sharply defined to meet standards. Again, because of budget constraints, many programs have limited resources for testing and often students are placed in class through an informal interview. At intake, procedures need to be set into place which allow for a balance between standardized tests (that allow for comparisons across programs) and program based alternative assessments that show where the learner fits into the particular program scheme.

Individual learning plans (as a document) for low proficiency level students are not practical because the learners cannot articulate their goals with enough specificity to be meaningful. Conducting the interviews bilingually is also not possible for large programs with students from many different language backgrounds. While the **process of helping learners articulate learning goals should begin at the lower levels (within the limited language available to the student) individual learning plans should only be *required* of intermediate level and advanced students.**

Ongoing Assessment Methods
Programs are required by federal law to report standardized testing information as one measure of learner gains and program success. Unfortunately, that is the one measure which may be the least valid in determining those factors. To date, there is no one instrument which can be recommended for all program contexts. Nor is there any that is sensitive enough to record general learner gains in the short periods of course time in which most ESL programs operate (40-100 hrs of non-intensive instruction). ESL programs should be allowed to **demonstrate that their assessment methods for determining student progress and learning gains are consistent with the type of program that they provide, and that their methods are valid and reliable.** Curriculum-based pre and post tests, competency based assessment or other alternative assessment systems which demonstrate gains in learning related to the instructional program and content will provide more meaningful data than scores on standardized achievement tests. However, it is possible to use standardized test scores to establish and validate program levels and determine program effectiveness among groups of learners as opposed to individual learner progress. The question remains which test to select and what is an appropriate sampling size and testing procedures. Technical assistance will surely be required.

Support Services
Programs should not be required to provide support services unless significant funds are available, rather they should be required to demonstrate their knowledge of where the services exist and how their participants are made aware of them.

Exit and Follow Up Procedures:
Exit interviews or counseling sessions are reasonable and appropriate, but of course require a substantial amount of additional time and resources.

ESL program participants are a highly transient population, and follow-up requirements (for each participant) to determine program impact would be difficult to meet. However, programs should conduct surveys of program drop outs to determine whether the program services should be improved or changed.

PART III. CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

Pelavin suggests indicators of program quality related to:

1. **Type of curriculum and instruction used**
2. **Materials and equipment used**
3. **Selection and evaluation of materials and equipment**

RATIONALE:
Information about curriculum, materials and equipment used, and how those materials are selected is valuable, particularly at a time when the field is changing, new trends are emerging, and the use of educational technologies is being encouraged. Aguirre International, has found that: "a strong curriculum is a conceptual framework that (1) outlines the kinds of literacy the program wants to achieve, (2) suggests approaches, methods, and materials; and (3) links classroom teaching at the various levels with assessment and evaluation." [6]

Since ESL learner needs and goals are broad and vary from program to program, the state should not necessarily mandate a standardized curriculum or mode of instruction, but guidelines in effective practices are appropriate. Some states have already provided direction to programs on methods and approaches, eg., California stresses lifeskills instruction and language acquisition over "language learning", other states are now identifying approaches that work best with second language learners (New York), and others have developed or are developing curriculum guides (Washington,Texas and Florida).[7] At a minimum, states should require that programs define the linkage between the needs assessment and the curriculum. Programs should establish their curricula first in terms which are appropriate for their learner goals and then in terms of learner needs within those goals. States should also demand that the approach is **educationally sound and reflects an understanding of what we know about second language acquisition, adult literacy and how adults learn.**

Based on a review of the literature and on input from researchers and practitioners in the field, the Aguirre study showed that educationally sound ESL literacy lessons shared the following characteristics: They are:

***Interactive** (students talk to each other and to the teacher; students are actively involved in generating writing and interpreting what others have written;)*

***Responsive** to multi-levels (students work together as a group or in pairs; activities work for different student levels)*

***Learner-centered**(the type of language and literacy taught supports the goals of the learners and builds on their personal strengths and their life experiences; students have the opportunity to make choices during the lesson; classroom activities are linked to learners' lives outside of class.)*

Meaning-based and communicative *(the activities that students are engaged in reflect language and literacy use outside of the classroom;there is a point to the lesson other than "literacy practice".)*

Integrated in respect to language skills *(reading, writing and oral language use are connected; conversations and discussions lead to reading and writing and vice versa)*

They also provide a balance between activities that focus on communications and the expression of ideas and those that emphasize language awareness.[9]

A strong ESL curriculum will also be organized by instructional levels with specific learner outcomes and related language skills. Additionally, a strong curriculum will define the methods and materials used for implementing the program. Most importantly, the methods and materials used by ESL programs should reflect an understanding of how adults learn and should provide for differences in a learner's ability and learning styles.

PART IV: STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

Pelavin proposes indicators of quality in this area as follows:

1. **Characteristics of staff**
2. **Staff responsibilities**
3. **Staff development**
4. **Use of volunteer staff**
5. **Evaluation of staff performance**

RATIONALE:
Implementation of a quality ESL program is dependent on the staff hired to conduct program activities. Yet, in the past, it was a commonly held view that "if you can speak English, you can teach English". It is difficult to say whether this view is the result of common employment conditions today or the cause of them. Currently, like the field of adult literacy in general, the majority of adult ESL programs in the country are staffed by part time teachers, some of whom are trained professionals, others are trained in other fields and others are volunteers.[9] There is an ongoing debate regarding "who is an adult educator?" and "who educates adults?" This debate cries out for the professionalization of the field of adult education and the teaching of English to adults. The indicators which Pelavin has suggested are appropriate and further our goal of professionalization. It would be helpful to see minimum staffing standards related to training, full/part time status, staff evaluation, and staff input into program design and evaluation. These minimum standards must be backed by the resources necessary to implement them.
A discussion of staff qualifications, however, must recognize the fact that there is no agreement in the field over appropriate qualifications for ESL literacy teachers. Minimum staffing standards may really work against a number of community-based organizations. Despite this conflict, if we are to improve quality of instruction, guidelines need to be established to assist CBO's in improving their staffing situations as well. TESOL's Standards and Self-Study document should be consulted in the development of standards for this area.[10]

Given this ongoing debate, **standards for staff development** will need to take a more prominent role for ESL programs. Staff development should be based on the needs of the instructors, the needs of the learners and the needs of the program. Standards will also need to be flexible enough to allow for changes that are occurring in staff development such as more teacher centered approaches, where the teacher is helped to meet his/her own goals. This

individualization of staff development is a very powerful means of meeting the needs of teachers, learners and programs.

Staff responsibilities is another issue that needs to be closely considered. Teachers should not be expected to volunteer their time beyond the paid classroom duties. The quality indicators that are being proposed will impact on them by requiring additional responsibilities for counseling, data collection and program input. They should be paid for these additional responsibilities. Most importantly the should be paid for **planning time**. Paying for planning time in itself sends a message to the practitioner that their endeavor is a professional one requiring an assessment of their individual student needs, an adaptation of the program curriculum to meet the needs and an integration of appropriate instructional and evaluation techniques and materials to implement the curriculum effectively.

SECTION III: PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Pelavin has suggested indicators for the following program outcomes:

1. **Retention**
2. **Educational gains**
3. **Employment**
4. **Goal achievement**

RATIONALE:
These indicators reflect the need to determine both impact on ESL learners and provide data for program accountability. No one would dispute the fact that accountability is necessary and justified. If we are designing and implementing sound learning systems then we should see successful outcomes. The problem then remains to **identify and use appropriate indicators and to separate out the purpose for which the data for the indicators will be used.** Ruth Nickse in her report, "A Typology of Family and Intergenerational Literacy Programs: Implications for Evaluation", identifies five levels of evaluation purpose that she applied to various types of family literacy programs. The following chart is an adaptation of her framework (for the purpose of examining Pelavin's quality indicators).[11]

LEVELS	LEVEL 1: NEEDS ASSESSMENT	LEVEL 2: ACCOUNTABILITY	LEVEL 3: PROCESS CLARIFICATION	LEVEL 4: PARTICIPANT PROGRESS	LEVEL 5: PROGRAM IMPACT
QUESTION	Is there a need for the program?	What will the program do to meet the need and how can it be monitored?	How can the program improve its services?	Are participants making progress?	What are the long term effects of program participants?
DATA ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER	*demographic info. *program design & contexts	*written operational plan *processes & content *curriculum and materials *inputs:staff,community, advisory board, evaluator, funding source	*participation rates *retention rates *program completion *client satisfaction.	*proficiency gains *level gains *goal attainment	*continuing education *improved job or income *long term goals met

Most adult ESL programs should be able to meet at least the first four levels of evaluation by providing the suggested outcome data. The fifth level, long term program impact as represented by Pelavin's suggested "employment" related indicators may not be possible to collect accurately.

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When it is collected and reported for state reports, the information may not be correct because it is often second-hand information from other students. Employment related outcomes, while interesting, cannot truly be attributable to general ESL program, even if valid data collection in this area were feasible.

The employment related outcomes that Pelavin suggests are related to what Hal Beder described in his new book, Adult Literacy Issues For Policy and Practice as the "human capital theory of program impact."The human capital theory of impact provides justification for federal expenditures on adult literacy instruction, the theory being that improving literacy and basic skills will lead to " improved worker productivity which in turn leads to improved national productivity and increased national wealth." Beder lists four components to human capital impact: increased employment and increased quality of employment, increased income, reduced need for public assistance, continued investment by the student in further education. Beder noted several studies which showed human capital gains, but notes that without experimental control groups, there is no way to know with certainty that those gains were a result of adult literacy instruction. Beder states that when reasons why adults participate are considered, it is clear that most are striving to improve themselves. Beder recommends that "The federal adult literacy education program be held accountable for the broad personal and social development of its clients rather than to narrow human capital outcomes".[12]

Many programs have valid goals that are not directly related to employment such as strengthening literacy practices at home (family literacy); helping learners to communicate in English, access services, and gain greater independence (life skills programs), promote greater participation in the democratic process (community literacy and civics classes)preparing to enter GED, college or vocational programs.

Much of the literature maintains that increased self-esteem, stronger decision making skills, and effective strategies for learning how to learn are important outcomes of language and literacy programs. Programs that include these domains in their framework should be encouraged to show:

(1) how their efforts link linguistic goals with non-linguistic goals,
(2) what educational opportunities are provided to reach these goals, and
(3) how staff plans to evaluate whether (and to what extent) these goals have been met[13]

Therefore, given the fact that we cannot directly attribute human capital gains to general ESL programs, given the need to also impact on the social and personal goals of learners (because that is their primary reason for participation), and given the limited resources that programs have, isn't it more important to measure outcomes over which we have control i.e, retention, educational gains and goal achievement? These three areas are within a program's control over data, and outcomes can be directly attributable to program processes.

Making comparisons of outcomes across programs, however, will still be difficult since effective ESL programming is a dynamic process. Outcomes are based on individual program focus, learner goals, educationally sound program curricula and practices, quality of classroom instruction and evaluation procedures. No two programs are the same. Quality indicators should take this into account and allow for program-based assessment.

Summary

While the use of quality indicators is appropriate, we must be realistic in our expectations. After conducting research on over 200 programs nominated for their promising practices, Wrigley and Guth have found that it is not possible to identify "one definitive program to model". In their forthcoming manual, Adult ESL Literacy: Issues, Approaches,and Promising Practices, the researchers state:

> *Given the large variety of programs and the diversity in program focus (general, workplace,family, community literacy) and program goals (self-sufficiency; acculturation; academic...) "establishing standards" might require that we emphasize processes that help ensure quality instead of focusing on outcomes or products. That is, programs should be held accountable for having in place structures, plans, and evaluation tools, that promote quality education.*

For accountability's sake, programs will be asked to show how they

- *plan to implement a quality program*
- *"define success" (both in program terms and related to learner outcomes)*
- *will evaluate program success and judge learner progress*

plan to develop their own standards and help ensure that those will be met.

Accountability will be based on the quality of:

1) *their planning process*
2) *their effort to provide quality service*
3) *their flexibility and responsiveness to learner needs*
4) *their evaluation efforts, geared toward both program improvement overall and assessment of learner progress and performance*
5) *the actual changes made based on the evaluation results*
6) *the establishment of quality indicators based on program experience over a reasonable time* [14]

While this may not be a popular approach to take in defining program accountability, it may be a more realistic one (given the state of the art and the unique characteristics of ESL programs which on the one hand enables them to be responsive, and on the other hand impedes comparison of programs against each other).

When finalizing quality indicators, it is essential that the following general characteristics of ESL programs be kept in mind:

1) There is wide diversity among ESL programs in terms of service delivery settings, in terms of program focus, and in terms of funding sources. **Quality indicators must be broad enough to capture the essence and the reality** of these varied programs and **flexible enough to enable them to be responsive** to their client population and to the many other different requirements that they must be accountable for (funding sources, parent organization rules and regulations, etc.)

2) Quality indicators must be written in such a way that they **promote responsive** programming **not inhibit it.** Programs must continue to be able to be responsive to the wide range and varied needs and goals of their learners.

3) **ESL programs have limited resources.** The spirit of the indicators should be such that it encourages and promotes quality services to the learners. If accountability requirements become so cumbersome, and monitoring so rigid, as to cause programs to spend an unreasonable amount of valuable time and resources to meet those requirements, then quality will suffer. If programs are to meet and maintain a minimum set

of standards, then additional time, resources and technical assistance must be made available.

The field is changing and quality indicators must allow for new trends to emerge and for new approaches to be tried. Quality indicators must take into account the creative and experimental nature of programming for effective and innovative ESL and literacy programs. Quality indicators must enable the emergence and experimentation with such trends as:

* Participatory education: Programs in which learners have a role in program implementation, curriculum, and assessment
* Learner strategies training: An approach which encourages cognitive awareness and control over learning
* Educational technologies: There is still much to be learned about the potential that new technologies hold for language teaching
* Functional context instruction: An approach to training which narrows learning to specific content areas

The pluralistic and experimental nature of the field of adult ESL must be safeguarded or we risk the loss of responsive education and the ability to grow and expand knowledge and experience in exploring innovative and effective ways to provide instruction.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

SECTION 1: Program Context

1) Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?
ESL programs are unique in having a greater need for assessing information which can help them define their ever changing and growing populations. This ever-constant need to evaluate context and make programming decisions based on the context defines the very "fluid nature of ESL programming." However, this characteristic of good ESL programs will make it difficult to evaluate programs against each other. The immediate implication is that programs should be evaluated against how they have defined their contexts, what processes they have established to be responsive and what outcomes they have established for themselves.[15] This is surely not a politically popular implication, but it is the reality of the nature of ESL programs.

Concerning information on **"the number and demographics by skill level" pg.2,** programs should have formal descriptions of proficiency levels and should define the relationships among their placement tests, instructional levels, and expected outcomes.[16] Ideally, the levels would be established or correlated to nationally recognized systems. This can be done by either establishing common skill level definitions at the state level or enabling programs to give their own definitions. There are several possible resources for defining levels: the Mainstream English Training Program's Student Performance Level Descriptions,[17] CASAS Scores[18] or BEST test scores.[19] Several states already have skill level descriptions defined by the previously mentioned systems. However, it might be more advantageous and realistic for programs to be required to **define their own skill levels and demonstrate that they are appropriate for the type of learner and ESL program services that are being offered.** Perhaps the first step is to establish consistency and progression within a program before we try to compare programs. If programs define their own skill levels, those definitions should clearly indicate both the general language and specific language skills that are represented at **program entry and/or are expected at exit.**

Skill level descriptions will obviously differ between programs that focus on teaching English for lifeskills communication and programs that focus on workplace literacy skills, or pre-academic skills.

2) Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary? Should any be added? Which ones and why?
The information requirements proposed are appropriate and should be considered baseline. Ideally, programs will find out more information than is being required here.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONS: A statement of program mission. A broad mission statement will help the program determine how it perceives itself, how it wants to be perceived and whom it wants to serve. In this way it will help the state determine if proposed services are appropriate for the proposing organization.

DROP OR ADJUST: "Literacy levels of the community" (pg.2 of this report) - change to education levels of the community.

"The literacy levels of the community" is confusing. Who is the community? Those that are receiving services? The general population? The proposed target population? How would one gather data on the literacy levels of the community? Perhaps this should be changed to "**education data on the community**", which can easily be gathered through such means as census data and economic development data. Information on sub populations may also be possible, such as the number of people in the census tract that report that they do not speak English well.

3) Problems or other issues which would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?
Clear definitions of terms within the indicators will be required. For example, does "community" refer to the community in general or the target population? Does "skill level" mean individual language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) or does it mean general proficiency level? Perhaps skill levels would even be defined more broadly to include knowledge of U.S. culture or content such as workplace skills, citizenship information, knowledge of the community, etc. that a learner is expected to have or expects to develop in the course.

Concerning **"Characteristics of participants by skill level" (pg.2 of this report)** (data requirements on participant), in order to facilitate information to programs seeking data information and to avoid duplication of effort, it will be necessary

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to have a reporting process which will facilitate easy access to information on learners and programs that are currently in the system. The state's annual report to the U.S. Department of Education can serve as one valuable source of information for local providers as well as for the Department of Education. It should also be noted that programs may not be familiar with sources for data requirements and some guidance or technical assistance may be necessary.

Last, but not least, is the fact that ESL programs are generally poorly funded and primarily staffed with part-time personnel. Although many programs conduct the aforementioned activities, the information may not always be in a format that is meant for outside consumption.

SECTION II: Program Process and Content
PART I: Program Planning

1) Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?
Although Pelavin's indicators are reasonable for this area, it can be expected that there may be many programs that would not be able to produce written evidence of these activities because of time and resource constraints. Good programs, however, do conduct these kinds of planning activities. **It is the planning and evaluation process that is most important.** The task of developing an overall operational plan may seem overwhelming at first, but programs should be encouraged to organize and compile materials produced from the planning process into a systematic operational plan and demonstrate how that operational plan was developed, how it will be evaluated, and how it will be revised.
If programs establish an overall operational plan then the next logical step is technical assistance for formative and summative evaluations of the plan.

2) Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary?, Should any be added? Which ones and why?
Pelavin suggests a need for quality indicators for Program Planning related to community input in program development, coordination activities, and written operational plan. Each of these areas is appropriate in that they take into account the who, what, where, when and why of planning. All ESL programs **should conduct planning and coordinating activities.** However, **"Holding Public Hearings"(pg. 4 of this report)**, may be an indicator which is significant only if the state or federal agency requires it. Less formal focus group discussions with current and potential clientele usually are far more desirable and productive. Holding public hearings for ESL populations would also require bilingual assistance, and in most programs there are numerous language groups represented.

3) What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?
As always, time and resources will be a problem for ESL programs. The activities described above are clearly administrative. Adequate resources and technical assistance must be made available if these activities are to be required.

Part II: Program Process and Content

1) Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?
There is wide diversity among programs offering ESL instruction. This diversity includes type of program, program focus, program approaches and philosophies, funding sources, etc. There is also a wide diversity in learner goals and needs. This diversity from both programming and learner needs perspective must be taken into account. There must be a balance between the need to control and regulate quality services and the need to allow for creative, innovative and responsive programming.

2) Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary?, Should any be added? Which ones and why?

ADJUST:
The indicator that will be the most problematic for ESL programs and learners at the lowest proficiency levels is **"development of individual learning plans"**. It **is not the process** that will be challenged, **but the product.** Many practitioners will tell you that at this level "an individual learning plan" is an empty exercise in paperwork. Most practitioners will agree that learners at the lowest proficiency levels cannot express goals in English and indeed the concept is likely to be culturally alien to them. Forcing very beginning language learners (particularly literacy students) to set goals that may be too high and unrealistic can frustrate them and cause them to drop out. However, most

practitioners recognize that it is important to help learners take charge of their learning by enabling them to begin to discover and articulate their goals. "A process for accomplishing this must keep two issues in mind, (1) learners new to speaking English may not be able to articulate their goals (especially at the beginning course), and (2) learner goals may change as they gain greater confidence and increase their proficiency." [20] For learners at intermediate and advanced levels, individual learning plans may be more appropriate instruments for goal definition than for the lower proficient students. For them, perhaps more manageable learning goals (ie., life skills competencies) that the learner can achieve and experience success with will be more favorably received by both learners and instructors and will enable them to begin the process of goal articulation.

3) What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?
Discussed in #1 above.

Part III: Curriculum and Materials

1) Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?
ESL populations, unlike ABE populations are ever changing and programs must be able to recognize new population trends, assess their needs and respond with new and appropriate curricula that are linked to the changing needs. It is reasonable for a state agency to require programs to define their instructional program in such a way as to enable the state to determine whether content is based on learner goals and needs assessment as well as whether the processes are appropriate. For example, if a program determines that a large number of prospective learners need to learn English in order to function in daily life, a grammar-based syllabus would not show a relationship between learner needs and the proposed plan of instruction. Similarly, a program that has as its goal to help parents support the schooling of children, needs a curriculum that includes strategies for understanding and interacting with the U.S. school system. Responsiveness to context is the key for determining appropriateness of curriculum and approaches.

2) Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary?, Should any be added? Which ones and why?
The indicators are appropriate.

Most adult ESL programs still do not have access to adequate equipment for instruction. As our communities and work places become more technologically advanced, it is increasingly important for adult learners to use educational technologies. Adult ESL programs should begin to at least plan for the use of educational technologies and explore ways in which the equipment might be acquired.

SUGGESTED ADDITION:
a) Methods and materials should be **educationally sound** and reflect an understanding of how adults learn
b) Program has developed a plan for using and integrating educational technologies

3) What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?
Time and resources will be required to truly achieve this standard. ESL teachers are very creative individuals and the field would benefit from additional allocation of resources to programs for classroom based research, teacher input in programming and evaluation, and development and dissemination of materials.

Part IV: Staff Qualifications

1) Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?
All of the indicators specified by Pelavin are commendable and would indeed demonstrate quality in the area of staff qualifications. However, there is a unique aspect that should be taken into account - the largely part time staffing situation of most ESL programs. This severely limits their availability for staff development and for more staff input and involvement in program design and evaluation. Additional funds for these activities must be forthcoming.

2) Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary?, Should any be added? Which ones and why?

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The indicators are appropriate with adequate resources to support them. Paid pre-service and inservice as well as pay for non-classroom program input are essential elements of quality indicators for staff development.

Suggested Addition:
a) The term **"Staff qualifications"** as opposed to "staff characteristics" should be used in the indicators. There is a specialized body of knowledge about teaching English as a Second Language that has been developed and articulated. ESL teachers should have training in the study of language, second language acquisition theory, adult learning theory and ESL teaching methodology.

b) Paid Planning time should be included as an indicator of program quality. Paying for planning time recognizes this as a professional activity and is consistent with practices in other educational settings such as the public schools.

c) Use of volunteer staff should be viewed as a supplement to paid instructional staff.

3) What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?
Most adult ESL programs have chosen to allocate funds toward services at the expense of full time staffing. This is due to the burgeoning need for services that administrators face daily. Most ESL programs could not function without the hard work and contributions of a trained part-time workforce and a volunteer force. However, if programs are to be measured by new and stringent quality indicators, it must be made clear to the funding agency that professional standards require a stable and professional base staff. As Hal Beder states, "Clearly, if adult literacy education is worth doing, it is worth doing well. This requires a well trained, well paid professional workforce. To this end, reliance on part time teachers and volunteers is anathema."[21]

Section III: Program Outcomes
1) Are there unique aspects of ESL programs that should be taken into account in the development of indicators? What adjustments and adaptations to a generic set of indicators may be necessary?
Limited time and resources, open entry/open exit procedures (which are typical of most ABE/ESL programs), and lack of good standardized test measures, diversity of program types, settings, and goals are all aspects that should be taken into account when setting indicators. Wrigley and Guth suggest that: "Given the diversity of programs and the resources that have been expended on ESL, it may be unreasonable to expect programs to meet externally defined standards. It may first be necessary to require programs to make all reasonable efforts to (1) improve their services (many may need guidance) and (2) provide documentation and what they have done and why, and then (3) develop their own standards given their particular realities."[22]

2) Are these indicators appropriate for ESL programs? Are any unnecessary?, Should any be added? Which ones and why?
Indicators in the area of retention, educational gains and learner goals are appropriate. Indicators in the area of employment changes are not appropriate for general adult ESL programs, because of reasons described in rationale section. An additional problem for ESL programs in inquiring about employment is the issue of confidentiality. Many programs are funded by non federal dollars and there are probably many undocumented aliens participating in the programs who would be reluctant to give employment data. It would be disruptive to program procedures to require employment information for some of the students and not from others, particularly when there is very little confidence in the information's accuracy and relevance.

3) What problems or other issues would confront ESL programs when using these or similar indicators?
Standardized testing remains a problem for adult ESL programs. Although there is a federal requirement for standardized testing, it should be recognized that there are no standardized tests which can be generally applicable to all types of ESL programs. Most are not sensitive enough to measure general language proficiency gains in short periods of time (especially for low proficiency levels), and most are very lengthy and costly to administer. Additionally, most standardized tests focus on individual facets of language, listening, speaking, reading, writing or grammar. This one dimensional approach does not capture the holistic nature of second language learning. Thomas Sticht, in his report, "Testing and Assessment in ABE and ESL Programs," reports that there is serious concern from the field about the federal requirement for standardized testing.[23] He suggests, "Generally, in testing in ESL programs, as in other ABE programs, it may be desirable to separate testing for program accountability from testing for instructional decision making."[24] This is a valuable suggestion and programs should be allowed to submit other data on learner gains which will yield more meaningful data related to the outcomes of instruction.

Learner gains in ESL should also be considered in light of various program and student related conditions. Research conducted by the MELT project identified program related factors such as intensity of instruction offered, program curricula, trained staff, etc had an impact on amount of learner gains made. While these quality indicators will help address some of these program factors, there are other student related factors which impact on learning gains (age, previous education, previous language experience, physical abilities, etc.)[25]

ENDNOTES

1. Informal correspondence with Gloria Guth

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9."Ninety-four percent of adult literacy teachers work part-time, and 40% are unpaid volunteer. The number of full-time teachers has declined 48% since 1980", Pugsley, Ronald. "Vital Statistics: Who Is Served By The Adult Education Program". Washington, D.C.:Division of Adult Educ. and Literacy, U.S. Dept. of Educ. March 1990. (Draft)

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11. Ruth Nickse."A Typology of Family and Intergenerational Literacy Programs:Implications for Evaluation", paper presented at Annual Meeting of Amer. Educ. Research Assoc., Chicago, Illinois, 1991

12. Hal Beder. 1991. Adult Literacy:Issues For Policy and Practice. Malabar, FL:Krieger Publishing Co.

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14. Heide Spruck Wrigley and Gloria J.A. Guth, Adult ESL Literacy:Issues,Approaches, and Promising Practices; Aguirre International(forthcoming)

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16. **MELT-SEIP ELT** Document and Institutional Self-Assessment Measure (ISAM), Handbook for CBAE Staff Development. San Francisco: Center for Adult Education. 1984.

17. **Mainstream English Language Training Project (MELT)**, a demonstration project funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1985-89, yielded the MELT Student Performance Level Document (SPL's). The document describes student abilities across the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing for 10 proficiency levels.

18. **California Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS)**, San Diego, CA., The system helps to place adults in ESL and ABE programs as well as vocational and high school diploma programs. It is also used to measure student achievement and to certify competency.

19. **Basic English Skills Test (BEST)**, Washington D.C.: Center For Applied Linguistics.

20. Informal correspondence with Heide Wrigley.

21. Beder, pg. 135

22. op. sit. Spruck Wrigley and Guth, Adult ESL Literacy.

23. Thomas Sticht. 1990. "Testing and Assessment in ABE and ESL". San Diego: Applied Behavioral Cognitive Science, Inc.

24. Op cit. pg. 26.

25. MELT Documents and Resource Guide, Office of Refugee Resettlement. Washington, D.C.:HHS, 1985-89